February One
The Story of The Greensboro Four

David Richmond
Franklin McCain
Jibreel Khazan (formerly Ezell Blair, Jr.)
Joseph McNeil

...The world can change in a day

A Teaching Resource Guide

Video Produced by:
Video Dialog Inc.
1320 Broad Street
Durham, NC 27705
Introduction

Despite hard-fought gains in the fight for racial equality, segregation remained firmly entrenched in 1960’s America. Blacks in the South were still treated as second-class citizens and their calls for justice remained largely unheard by the nation. There had been some advances in the arena of civil rights with the 1954 Brown v. Board of Education U. S. Supreme Court decision, the Montgomery bus boycott from 1955 to 1956, and the federally enforced desegregation of Little Rock’s Central High School in 1957, but after that strong defiance by ardent segregationists pushed the Movement into retreat.

February 1, 1960 changed all that.

Based largely on first hand accounts and rare archival footage, February One documents one volatile winter in Greensboro, NC, that not only challenged public accommodation laws in North Carolina, but served as a blueprint for the wave of non-violent civil rights protest that swept the South and the nation throughout the 1960’s.

Curriculum Objectives

- Introduce students to a landmark moment in the Civil Rights Movement that took place in North Carolina, but had a significant impact that spread across the South and the world.
- Investigate the legal ramifications of segregation laws on American society.
- Examine the political movements that developed in response to Jim Crow laws.
- Assess the extent to which the Civil Rights Movement transformed American society.
- Demonstrate methods used to obtain civil rights, including non-violent protest and direct action by citizens.
- Develop student’s critical thinking skills by challenging them to analyze primary documents, photographs, the role of the media, and the dialogue and actions of the various groups observed in the video.

The lesson plans created for the February One video support the goals outlined in the National Council for the Social Studies, as well as the N. C. Standard Course of Study in the areas of Civics and Economics and U. S. History. The web Sites are located on page 37.
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Pre-Viewing Activities

Use the Video Synopsis and Biographies to prepare students for the video. You may see if your class can match the short bios to the pictures of the “other participants.” The Sequence of Events, in particular, can do a great deal toward keeping students focused and can enhance student understanding.

You may want to refer to the Civil Rights Time Line to provide additional historic background. Many students already have the perception that the Montgomery Bus Boycott was the end of the Movement. You may wish to visit the suggested web sites and refer to the bibliography listed at the end of the guide.

Quotes are useful when preparing students for the opening of a new topic. They may be used for brainstorming as a class or individual work. They are also useful in the expansion of a student’s vocabulary. The following quotes are only suggestions. You may preview the video before student viewing and use others you find compelling. You may ask the students to write down what they believe it means, or if they can say the same thing in a different way. Depending on your class, you may ask them what event may have caused the writer to voice his or her concerns and what emotions or thoughts were behind the words. See page 40 for an overhead copy of these quotes.

“Segregation had ills and some advantages.”
Jean Howard

“I didn’t hate anybody, but I just thought that a system had betrayed me.”
Jibreel Khazan

“We used to say we may be poor, but we’re proud. Which would say that the parts might be torn, but they are clean.”
Joseph McNeil

“You guys better watch your mouths, your impression, your body language, because the way you act, its how people perceive you.”
Jibreel Khazan repeating the words of his father

“Walter Kronkite had on the documentary of Mahatma K. Gandhi. I couldn’t believe it, a little skinny brown skinned guy out of India . . . Led a movement for independence, through non-violence, through the teachings of Jesus Christ. Then I began to realize since I was only about 106 lbs. maybe I could do something like that too!”
Franklin McCain

“By and large his conversation was not about people, it was about things, more of ideals.”
Jibreel Khazan speaking about Joe McNeil

“At least I’ve accomplished something, one thing in my life that I am proud of.”
David Richmond

“. . . With all this mob of people yelling and jeering and carrying on, . . . and in one of the most moving moments of my entire life was the fact that we stood and they said the Lord’s Prayer.”
Ann Dearsley Vernon
Greensboro, North Carolina, was a fairly typical Southern city in the middle of the 20th Century. The city was certainly segregated, but city officials prided themselves on handling race relations with more civility than many other Southern cities.

In Greensboro, on the eve of the Second World War, Ezell Blair, Jr. was born. Ezell later changed his name to Jibreel Khazan. He was the son of an early member of the NAACP who introduced his children to the idea of activism at an early age.

Ezell attended Dudley High School, an all-black high school in Greensboro’s segregated school system, where he befriended Franklin McCain. Franklin, raised in the more racially open city of Washington, DC was angered by the segregation he encountered in Greensboro. Ezell and Franklin also became friends with David Richmond, the most popular student at Dudley High.

In 1958, Ezell and David heard Martin Luther King, Jr., speak at Bennett College in Greensboro. At the same time, the rapid spread of television was bringing images of oppression and conflict from around the world into their living rooms. Ezell was inspired by the non-violent movement for independence led by Mahatma Gandhi and chilled by the brutal murder of Emmett Till.

In the fall of 1959, Ezell, Franklin, and David enrolled in Greensboro’s all-black college, North Carolina A & T State University. Ezell’s roommate was Joseph McNeil, an idealistic young man from New York City. Ezell, Franklin, David, and Joseph became a close-knit group and got together for nightly bull sessions in their dorm rooms. During this time they began to consider challenging the institution of segregation.

The breaking point came following Christmas vacation when, on returning from a visit to New York City, Joe McNeil was denied service at the Greyhound bus station in Greensboro. Joe’s degrading experience made the four friends decide to stop talking and actually do something. On the night of January 31, 1960, after several weeks of discussion, they challenged one another finally to take action. They sat down and penned a document/letter signed by the “Students Executive Committee For Justice”.

Word definitions: segregated, civility, activism, befriended, oppression, idealistic, close-knit, bull sessions, degrading, penned

Organizations: NAACP

People: Martin Luther King, Jr., Emmett Till, Mahatma Gandhi

Regional Differences: Northern cities, the South, and the Deep South
Sequence of Events

February 1, 1960 - In the afternoon, the four friends gathered in front of the A & T library and walked downtown to Woolworth’s. They made small purchases, saving their receipts to prove they were customers. Then they took their seats at the whites-only lunch counter. The waitresses and the store manager, C. L. Harris, denied them service, but they remained seated. The police arrived on the scene, but without provocation were unable to take action against the four students. Finally, it was announced that the store was closing early. The Greensboro Four vowed to return the next day. With no plan in place for continuing the sit-ins the four rushed back to campus to recruit students to help them.

February 2, 1960 - In an excerpt from his diary, C. L. Harris, the manager of Woolworth’s, observed that long before any students arrived for the second day of the sit-ins, UPI and AP newspaper reporters, as well as local TV news crews, were gathered at the store. The intense television coverage was an important factor in the success of the sit-in movement, helping spread the protest to High Point, NC by the very next day.

February 3, 1960 - By opening time, there were students scrambling to get seats at Woolworth’s, but there was also growing opposition group. Whites taunted the demonstrators who refused to respond to incitement or provocation, but instead remained non-violent. By the third day, the sit-ins were on the national news and the protests had spread to Winston-Salem, N. C.

February 4, 1960 - Female students from Bennett College and Greensboro Women’s College joined the sit-in, including three white students. Also, among those demonstrating was Bettye Davis, who would later marry Frank McCain. The protests had effectively paralyzed Woolworth’s, and other Greensboro businesses.

February 5, 1960 - About 300 students were now sitting-in at Woolworth’s. Tensions were high and students feared being jailed or kicked out of school. The anxiety was most acute for David Richmond who had recently become a father. Meanwhile, the sit-in movement was spreading like wildfire to 35 - 40 other cities across the country.

February 6, 1960 - Witnesses estimate there were nearly 1,000 protesters and observers filling Woolworth’s and the Sit-ins had spread to the nearby Kress department store, bringing downtown Greensboro to a virtual standstill. With the crowd at Woolworth’s growing increasingly hostile, it was announced at 1:00 in the afternoon that the store was closing due to a bomb threat. Kress closed early as well.

February 7 - A & T students voted to suspend demonstrations, trying in good faith to give city and store officials an opportunity to work things out. The negotiations failed, and students resumed the protests at Kress and Woolworth’s. When the college students left for summer recess, Dudley High School students took their place. Finally, on July 26, 1960, store manager C. L. Harris agreed to integrate Woolworth’s lunch counter.

The simple, yet courageous act of sitting down to eat, by four students, was the catalyst that ignited a decade of revolt. Within two months the Sit-in Movement had spread to 54 cities in 9 states, including Nashville and Atlanta. Students had discovered the power of direct action, and a new generation came alive to transform the Civil Rights Movement.